Atonement of Jesus Christ, "The Nature of the Atonement"

- Hymn Suggestion - "I greet thee who my sure Redeemer art."
- **Prayer**
- Reading: **Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12**

Introduction

- The Old Testament prophet Isaiah has been called the prophet of the atonement!
- This passage, of course, is a good reason why.
- As we continue our Sunday school studies on the Doctrines of Grace, this morning's subject is the doctrine of "**Limited Atonement**."
- Examining this wonderful subject from God's holy Word, we should point out that **what preceded today's topic** and what will follow in the coming weeks are all **closely linked**.
- In other words, we are **NOT examining the Savior's work** today and next week in isolation from the other truths discussed in this class.
- As we have seen in previous weeks, the **doctrines we are studying all fall under the umbrella of our great God's Sovereign grace, mercy, and love.**
- We have discussed man's sinful condition, which resulted from Adam, the first man, rebelling against God. The scripture is clear that the end result is that "**all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God**" (Romans 3:23).
- What is the end result of sin, as the Apostle teaches us in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 1? Death! Spiritual death! "**And you were dead in the trespasses and sin**."
- In the language of the OT prophet Jeremiah, "**The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it**." Jeremiah 17:9
- Throughout God's word, it is clear that **Total Depravity** (the "T" in our TULIP acronym) is the condition of all mankind.
- In this condition, we discussed that mankind in and of themselves has NO HOPE!

- Yet in God's eternal plan, in His love and grace, God chose for himself a great number of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who would receive eternal life and be united with Jesus Christ.

- We said this was totally God's doing, not based on any conditions or on foreseeing a person's faith.

- In the language once again found in Ephesians, this time chapter 1: 3- 5," Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] **even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before him. **In Love [5,] he predestined us** for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

- As we examine the Atonement this week and, Lord willing, next week, it is **absolutely critical that we understand that the same sovereign grace and love that predestined the Elect (using the language of the Apostle Paul again) to eternal life is also the source that sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to suffer and die on behalf of sinners like us**!

- Those chosen by the Father in the election and given to the Son had to be redeemed from their sins. That is what limited atonement, or perhaps preferred definite atonement, means!

- I want to start with a question that I hope we can work through together this week and next week's class.

- **The question** is this: When **our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved?**

- **Or did our Savior die to make people redeemable, or did he die to redeem specifically those appointed to salvation**?

- To answer this question, which concerns the extent and purpose of the atonement, it is helpful first to examine its necessity and what the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ involves.

- **In fact, Scripture's strongest argument supporting the doctrine of "Limited Atonement" is the Lord Jesus' atonement work.**

- **When we see what Jesus accomplished and the benefits His work applied to sinners, we understand why we say He paid for the sins of the Elect of God!**

- So, the order that will follow in studying this subject, using Scripture as our guide, is as follows:

    1. The Necessity of the Atonement
    2. The Nature of the Atonement
    3. The Extent of the Atonement will address the "limited" term in the title "Limited Atonement."
    4. The Effects of the Atonement

The Necessity of the Atonement

- I want to start with a definition that I am borrowing from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology. It is a simple and broad definition. He writes:

  "The atonement is Christ's work in his life and death to earn our salvation."

- When we think of the atonement, we often think exclusively of our Savior's suffering and death on the cross. That is appropriate, but I like this simple definition because it **includes the saving benefits that result from that work**!

- In other words, our Savior earned our salvation for us! What a great truth!

- The Atonement **accomplished something very specific**, which is important to note as it affects **its extent**.

- **Question**: Why did our Lord Jesus need to go through all that he did? Why was it necessary for him to suffer and die when he himself was without any sin?

- Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "**Was it unnecessary that Christ suffer these things and enter into his glory**?" Luke 24:26

- Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26: "**My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will**."

- But it was NOT possible. He had to go through the horrible pain and suffering he was about to endure!

- 2 Peter says, "**God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell.**" Yet for man, God did NOT do that.

- In Isaiah 53:10, the Servant (the Lord Jesus Christ) "**makes an offering for guilt**."

- Why was the atonement necessary? Because Adam had rebelled against His maker. He rebelled against a just and holy God.

- If God was to be righteous and still save people from their guilt due to sin, someone had to pay the penalty due to the justice of a Holy God.

- The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman church in chapter 3:26: "**It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**."

- The book of Hebrews describes in many places why it was necessary for our Lord Jesus to come into the world, suffer, and die on our behalf.

- "**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. [16] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. [17] Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people**." Hebrews 2:14-18

- In all of our Savior's work, which addresses the necessity of the Atonement, we must understand that the work was an act of obedience! As John 6:38 states, "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him that sent..." me."

- **Romans 5:19**: "**For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."**

- So, the atonement was necessary because sinners are guilty, and God is a holy and righteous God!

- The Lord Jesus Christ offered himself in obedience to the will of the Father, "**making an offering for guilt**" in the words of Isaiah.

- Wasn't Election enough? Election appointed multitudes beyond number to eternal life, but Christ still had to atone for sins and redeem His people!

The Nature and the Character of the Atonement

- In the book of Isaiah, the Servant of the Lord accomplished great things on behalf of those He offered himself for.

- This leads us to a number of great biblical truths about the nature of the Atonement—what it was and what it did, or better yet, what Jesus did for his people.

- **We will examine four needs fulfilled by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, as described in Isaiah's description of the servant**. These truths make up the very heart of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

- They should stir our hearts up to a deeper love for God and a deeper desire to serve God!

- Understanding the nature of the atonement requires understanding these core components of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Substitution

- The first great need that Jesus met is that of substitution!

- **Read Isaiah 53:4-6**

- Notice the language of the prophet: "**He has borne our griefs," "carried our sorrows," "pierced for our transgressions," "crushed for our iniquities," and "with his wounds we are healed.**"

- The benefits that come to the recipient as the result of the servant's work of substitution are many!

- The concept of substitution is presented in the Old Testament sacrificial system. One very clear statement of this principle in the Old Testament is found in Leviticus 17:11, "**For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement**."

- Here, God indicates that the sacrificial animal, in its death, takes the place of the death due to the offeror, and the offering makes atonement for his sin.

- In the Old Testament, many sacrifices required the offeror to lay his hands on the animal before he would sacrifice it. **There was a transaction taking place!**

- God, of course, was preparing His people for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

- The sin of the one offering the sacrifice was imputed to the offering itself!

- The offering was the **substitute** bearing the punishment for sin.

- How perfectly that describes our Savior!

- The Apostle Paul, writing to the believers at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 5:21, wrote: "**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**."

- Jerry Bridges and another author named Bob Bevington have a wonderful book called "**The Great Exchange**." I love that title!

- The Title is taken from this passage in 2 Corinthians.

- How incredibly blessed God's people are! Jesus became sin, and **in him** (being united with him), we become righteousness! What a wonderful transaction! What a wonderful exchange!

- All by the incredible depth of the grace and love of God!!

- **Jerry Bridges writes of this passage in 2 Corinthians 5:21:** "**It would not be an understatement to view this verse, properly understood, as the single key verse of the entire Bible. God made Jesus Christ to be sin; that is, God took the initiative to make the great miracle of substitution happen, as Paul pointed out when he said, "All this is from God**."

- Brothers and Sisters, what a great Savior we have! Many truths are revealed in Scripture designed to bring peace and comfort to the heart of the believer. This one certainly ranks right up at the top!

- The Lord Jesus' substitutionary work is the heart of the good news of salvation, and the Apostles repeatedly repeated it.

- **I Peter 3:18**: "**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit**."

- We could, of course, look at dozens of Scripture references!

- While we will discuss "limited atonement " in detail next week, we should see from this great truth of substitution that the atonement was definite and intended for God's people.

- **In other words, our Savior suffered and died as our substitute**.

- **Did he also suffer and die as a substitute for paying the penalty for sin for those who ultimately will be eternally punished because of their sin**?

- **Question: Do you have any thoughts, comments, or discussion items before we proceed to the need for Christ to be accomplished**?

Reconciliation

- **The next great need** that the work of our Lord Jesus met for all those he became a substitute for **is the need for reconciliation**!

- In his book Redemption Accomplished and Applied, John Murray writes, "**Reconciliation places the focus on our alienation from God and the divine method of restoring us to favor**."

- Again, Isaiah 53:5 "**Upon him was the chastisement that brought us PEACE.**"

- **Those for whom the Savior atoned for their sins are at PEACE with God**! They have been reconciled through the work of the Servant!

- The apostle Paul rejoiced in this great truth. Romans 5:11-12 "**For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**"

- The absolute need we all have for reconciliation shows us that mankind is separated and alienated from God.

- As Isaiah says a bit later in his prophecy, chapter 59:2, "**Your iniquities have made a <u>separation</u> between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear**."

- **One commentator writes that the word for separation Isaiah uses only once in the Old Testament** in **Genesis 1:6,** which says, "**Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters**."

- How awful it is that mankind, outside of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, is **separated** like the waters above and below were separated at the time of creation!

- Along with being a substitute for the punishment of sin, our Savior's work on the cross **brings us into a peaceful, reconciled relationship with God**! The separation is broken!

- Colossians 1:19-20 "**For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross**."

- Ephesians 2:15-116 "**By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility**

- The work of Christ on behalf of his people reconciles God to us and us to God! In the words of the great Hymn, we often sing, "**Hallelujah, What a Savior**!"

- **Question: Do you have any thoughts or comments before we go on to need that Christ accomplished?**

Propitiation

- So, along **with the work of our redeemer as a substitute and in the work of reconciliation**, the next great work to discuss is a word we do not hear or use very often, but it is an important biblical word regarding the atonement.

- **The word is Propitiation**. It is not used often in the New Testament, though it is frequently used in the Old Testament.

- Propitiation addresses very specifically the **removal of God's wrath**.

- **The term "propitiation" in the context of atonement means "satisfaction" or "appeasement."**

- Propitiation in Scripture refers to the appeasement of God's wrath against sin, which is required by His justice, due to the death of Christ for sinners.

- The wrath of God was removed by the servant of God in Isaiah 53 because "**the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all**." **God's wrath has been satisfied because of the work of the Lord.**

- Propitiation is **<u>wonderfully pictured in the Old Testament Mercy Seat</u>**.

- The Mercy Seat was a slab of pure gold, 4 feet long and 2 feet wide.

- It covered the Ark of the Covenant**. Do you remember what was inside the Ark of the Covenant?** The tablets of God's law.

- **The Law exposes what in us**? **SIN. The Mercy Seat covers our sins! What a great picture of the Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

- When the priests in the Old Testament offered sacrifices on the altar, the Scriptures often say that they made a covering for sin.

- In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is revealed as our faithful high priest. He covers over his people's Sins, doing what the Old Testament priests could only symbolize!

- Scripture says in I John 2:2 that the Lord Jesus **is "the propitiation for ours: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world**."

- Lord willing, next week, we will examine the frequent phrase in John, "the whole world!" and discuss it in the context of limited atonement.

- The idea is that Christ's blood covers us. It has satisfied God's anger because of our violation of His Holy Law. Like the Mercy Seat covering the Ark of the Covenant, our Savior's blood covers the Christian!

- He has made satisfaction for our sin!!!

- This should teach us something about the seriousness of sin. We live in a world that has been taking sin much too seriously lately. How contrary to Scripture!

- **God hates it so much that Jesus had to appease the wrath of God on our behalf**!

- **Hebrews 2:17**: "**Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people**."

- **I John 4:10 reveals the motivating cause** of propitiation. "**In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."**

- The "**we," "us," and "our**" in this passage are believers, God's elect.

- So, Substitution (Jesus standing in our place taking the punishment we deserve), Reconciliation (restoring fellowship with God) means to exchange, to change a person from alienation to friendship), and now propitiation (to satisfy or appease the rightful anger of God because of sin).

- All of this belongs to the Christian as part of the atoning work of our beloved Savior!

- **So, we start to see why it is vital to understand atonement when studying a topic like limited atonement**!

- The work of our Savior benefits His people in many Ways. It should stir up our hearts in love and praise!

- We should also begin to see why we believe that the atonement was specifically and definitely for the Elect of God.

- These great benefits are the blessings of the children of God. They are all IN CHRIST. Purchased by the blood of Christ.

Redemption

- That leads us to the 4th great need that the atonement fully meets and that it accomplished.

- **That is the need for redemption**.

- **<u>Here, we refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, through his work of atonement, purchased salvation for his followers people.</u>**

- The word in Scripture means "**to buy out." Especially of purchasing a slave with a view to his freedom.**

- **Galatians 4:4-5** "**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons**."

- The work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of His people involves a purchase. The cost was extremely high!

- What was the purchase price? Our Lord himself—Jesus was the ransom price!

- When we hear the word ransom, we usually think of kidnappers setting a price for releasing what they have stolen. **In redemption, Jesus himself was the ransom price.**

- **Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many**."

- John Murray has a helpful comment on this matter of redemption.

- **READ Murray Page42**

- **We will discuss the extent of the atonement, Lord willing, in detail next week.**

- **However, Redemption, and all that it has accomplished and applied to the benefit of the Christian, is perhaps one of the strongest arguments for the extent of the atonement applying to the people of God <u>and NOT every individual that has ever lived!</u>**

- Redemption does not mean someone is redeemable. Rather, our great Savior has purchased and secured our redemption from the penalty of sin!

- I cannot think of any other truth in God's Word that provides such encouragement and assurance to Christians!

- Rejoice, Christian! God has done all that is necessary for you in the work on the cross by our Lord Jesus Christ!

- He is a substitute, taking our place for the punishment we deserve.

- He has reconciled us to God and God to us!

- He has satisfied and appeased the rightful wrath of God due to sin in propitiation.

- He has redeemed us and purchased our eternal salvation at the price of His own life.

- That is the great Savior we worship this morning!!!

- I want to end our discussion with a poem by the famous hymn writer Augustus Toplady.

- It helpfully summarizes our study this morning.

- **READ below, Toplady. "From whence this fear and unbelief."**

1 From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hast thou, O Father, put to grief
Thy spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on thee?

2 Complete atonement thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate'er thy people owed;
How then can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with thy blood?

3 [If thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.]

4 Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty;
Trust in his efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.